

General Background on Guatemala*See last page for Additional Resources***A. GENERAL INFORMATION about the Country**

- + Guatemala is a country of such beauty, yet it is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.
- + It is the 3rd largest country in Central America, about the size of Ohio.
- + It is the northernmost country in Central America. To the north and west, it borders Mexico; to the east, it borders Belize, Honduras, El Salvador and the Caribbean; and to the south, it borders the Pacific Ocean.

B. It has THREE MAIN GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS - The Coastal Plains, Lowlands and the Highlands.

- + 60% of the people live in the lower part of the highland, lowland, and coastal plains. 40% live in the northern Highlands where we will be visiting.
- + Any land above 1,000 ft is considered Highlands. Half of the country is considered Highland.
- + It is in the Sierra Madre mountain range where the 30 volcanic peaks are as well as the highest mountain, Mt Tajumulco Some of the volcanoes are active.
- + Guatemala is also prone to Earthquakes, the last four major ones occurring in 1717, 1773, 1917 and 1976. When we visit in Antigua on the back side of our mission you will see evidence of destruction from these earthquakes.

C. DIVIDED into 22 Departments equivalent to States or provinces.

- + We visit in the Department [or State] of Quiche, one of the largest departments. It is where mostly the indigenous Mayas live
- + This whole Department [State] suffered severely during the war. (*Refer to map in Team Notebook*)
- + The capital of the Department of Quiche is Santa Cruz Del Quiche, which is where we lodge. It is a town of approximately 50,000 people.

D. POPULATION is 14.7 million with 2.5 million living in Guatemala City.

- ✚ 43% of the population in Guatemala is under 15 yrs of age.
- ✚ 53% of population is between 15 and 64 years of age.
- ✚ 4% are over 65 yrs of age.
- ✚ 47% of the people live in cities, while 53% live in rural areas.

E. CLIMATE

- ✚ Guatemala has a tropical climate. In our location there are no mosquitoes however.
- ✚ The Rain Season is from May to October. In the Highlands, there could be as much as 80 inches of rain. After the first rain of the season in May, the Maya will plant their corn. Lack of rain will mean lack of food for the Maya.
- ✚ Temperatures vary depending on the altitude and nearness to the coast. We will be at a 6500 ft. elevation where the temperature range is between 77 – 86 F during the day, with nights being chilly, but not terribly cold. Because buildings are not heated, it is wise to bring warm clothes for evenings and early mornings.

F. ECONOMY

- ✚ Climate is ideal for growing coffee, sugar, bananas, cardomom and vegetables. These are the main products exported
- ✚ 75% of the population live below the poverty level.

G. LIFE EXPECTANCY

- ✚ General Population: Women 73 yrs and men 66 years of age.
- ✚ Maya Population: Women 56 yrs and men 48 years of age.

H. INFANT MORTALITY RATE (2011 EST.)

- ✚ General Population: 26.02 deaths per 1,000 live births
Maya Population: 150 deaths per 1,000 live births.

I. TWO MAIN GROUPS OF PEOPLE

+ Ladinos (people of mixed Spanish and Maya blood).

- Ladino is not a derogatory term and is sometimes used to describe an Indian who has forsaken traditional Indian dress and custom.
- Ladinos wear Western-style clothing, generally enjoy a higher standard of living than the Mayas.
- Ladinos are more likely to work in shops, government departments, or as paid laborers in industry.
- Nearly all the larger commercial businesses are owned by Ladinos, as are most of the large tracts of land.
- Guatemala suffers from an uneven distribution of wealth and opportunities for its people. 65% of the land is owned by 2% of the people

+ Indigenous Maya

- Over half of the population of Guatemala is Maya.
- Guatemala is the only country in the Americas where the majority of population is Indigenous.

+ Basic Difference

- The Ladino and Indian cultures go back to Spanish colonial rule.
- The Spanish regarded the Indians as ignorant pagans. The unfortunate legacy of this in modern Guatemala is that the population is still affected by racist attitudes.

J. LANGUAGE

- + Spanish is the official language of Guatemala, but there are more than 20 indigenous Dialects spoken.
- + The dialect of Quiche is spoken where we will be visiting. There are Leaders who speak Spanish and Quiche so we communicate by going from English to Spanish and from Spanish to Quiche.

K. HEALTH

- ✚ In general the level of health care in Guatemala is very poor and there are serious untreated health problems in the rural areas.
- ✚ The lack of proper facilities and medical personnel in the countryside helps account for the high infant mortality rate.
- ✚ The mortality rate for children under 5 years is 39%.
- ✚ The main causes of infant and child mortality are diarrhea, respiratory infections, and childbirth problems all of which are relatively easy to prevent with necessary resources.

Additional References:

State Dept. also provides general statistical information:

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2045.htm>

UNICEF: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/guatemala_statistics.html

<http://www.savethechildren.org/countries/latin-america/caribbean/guatemala.html>